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Jacksonville District

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P.O. Box 4970 Jacksonville, FL 32232-0019

Contact: Nanciann Regalado, CCO
Phone: 904-232-2236 - FAX: 904-232-2237
Email: nanciann.e.regalado@saj02.usace.army.mil

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

U.S ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS MAKES RELEASES FROM LAKE OKEECHOBEE

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will begin a 10-day Level 1 pulse release from Lake Okeechobee to the Caloosahatchee River and the St. Lucie Canal on Thursday, February 16, 2006.

The Corps' South Atlantic Division approved a temporary planned deviation to the normal operations under the Water Control Plan for Lake Okeechobee and Everglades Agricultural Area, Water Supply/Environment (WSE). This deviation gives water managers the authority to make additional releases up to a Level 1 pulse through December 31, 2006. Similar temporary deviations were used in 2004 and 2005.

In the very active 2004 hurricane season the similarly approved planned deviation removed an additional 0.8 feet of water off Lake Okeechobee. Without the deviation the lake could have risen to 19 ft-National Geodetic Vertical Datum (NGVD).

In the record-setting 2005 hurricane season the similar planned deviation removed more than 0.8 ft. of water off Lake Okeechobee. Without the deviation the lake could have risen to more than 18 ft-NGVD. This deviation is an attempt to lower Lake Okeechobee and minimize the need for large freshwater discharges to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Estuaries during this upcoming wet season.

Pulse releases are designed to mimic nature and provide discharges from the lake to the estuaries via the St. Lucie Canal to the east and the Caloosahatchee River to the west. The last two days of the 10 day, Level 1 pulse release consists of an average daily flow of 500 cfs to the Caloosahatchee and no releases to the St. Lucie. The goal is to strike a balance between the health of the lake's littoral zone and the health of the estuaries.

Today's lake level is 15.51 feet-NGVD, which is 0.67 feet higher than this time last year.

In 10 days, a Level 1 pulse release to the Caloosahatchee River and the St. Lucie canal can lower the lake 0.10 ft.; a Level 2 release can lower it by 0.14 ft.; and a Level 3 by 0.18 ft.

In the future, the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) will provide storage for much of this water and reduce the need for these types of releases.

Issues that are currently being considered in the decision making for Lake Okeechobee releases include, but are not necessarily limited to, current weather patterns, prediction for the upcoming hurricane season, impact on the estuarine ecosystem, water supply, lake ecology, and input from Kissimmee River Basin regulatory discharges.

Water level data and flows for Lake Okeechobee and the Central and Southern Florida Project can be found on the water management page on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Jacksonville District web site at <http://www.saj.usace.army.mil/h2o/index.htm>.

For further information, please call the Jacksonville District Corporate Communication Office at 904-232-2236 or (cell) 904-614-4976.

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